

Message

From: Evdokia Nikolova [eddie.nikolova@gmail.com]
Sent: 3/22/2019 9:29:28 PM
To: Tewfik, Ahmed H [tewfik@austin.utexas.edu]
Subject: comparison with Zoya Heidari from Petroleum Engineering
Attachments: Nikolova-Dean Statement_highlighted.pdf; Heidari, Zoya_Redacted.pdf

Hi Ahmed,

I am working on my letter to the President, and my letter to the CCAFR committee both due this Monday March 25. I just received this information last night on Zoya Heidari from Petroleum Engineering who was promoted to associate with tenure last year after 4 years at A&M and just 2 years at UT. (See attached Dean's assessment for Zoya and for me in comparison). The below is not going to be in the letter in this form, this is just personal bullet points that I wrote.

Regarding the below "commitment" to Zoya that the Dean references to consider her tenure case at UT in a timely manner, I am including the following statement (maybe not in this exact final language):

"The reassurance to Zoya (made in spring/summer of 2015) was not in writing and I also received a similar verbal reassurance (in spring/summer of 2013) from my Department Chair Ahmed Tewfik, thus I need to ask why hers was honored and mine not. "

Thanks,
 Evdokia

 Zoya Heidari from Petroleum Engineering was promoted last year (2018) to Associate professor with tenure, having gone up after 4 years at Texas A&M and 2 years at UT. Thus she was 3 years early on the UT clock. She told me that when coming to UT, she made a deal with the Dean to be considered for tenure soon after joining UT. The Dean's Assessment for her, in its last paragraph states:

1. One may ask why Dr. Heidari is being considered for promotion at this time, when she has not yet reestablished her research program at UT. A commitment was made when she was recruited from Texas A&M that her promotion case would be considered in a timely manner.

In comparison with me:

- * Zoya's undergraduate teaching scores are below the median and a peer teaching reviewer offered her very specific suggestions for improvement. Mine were above the median, my peer teaching reviewers offer evaluations of "very clear teaching style" and "effective classroom teacher" and my budget council assessment is "exceeds expectations".
- * The Dean does not mention my peer teaching reviews and does not mention my many positive and glowing student comments (nor any reference to the budget council evaluation).
- * The Dean calls Zoya "a dedicated teacher" while she calls my teaching record "modest" and not having taken responsibility to improve it. (which is incorrect, as evidenced by specific steps of improvement outlined in my teaching statement as well as appendix at end of my rebuttal of how I have addressed most student comments for improvement).
- * Funding: The Dean says

1. Her share of research funding at Texas A&M exceeded \$3.4 million, which is a remarkable amount. However, the level of peer-review for these grants is not clear.

For me the Dean recognizes my funding has come from "highly competitive sources". My total funding amount of \$1.8 million cannot be directly compared to Zoya's as the standards for funding in our different research



areas are completely different. I do remark that for theoretical research like mine, the standard is generally less than half that of applied areas and as such my funding record is equivalent and is very strong (as mentioned in my external letters).

* In terms of funding pattern, the Dean remarks that Zoya has obtained almost all her funding at Texas A&M and only \$200K (5%) of funding at UT (compared to \$1.1 million or 60% for me). She heavily penalizes me for what she considers a drop in funding while she gives great leniency to Zoya stating

1. The global decrease in oil prices has reduced Dr. Heidari's ability to secure research funding from industry at UT...
1. The department budget council and I do not believe that the global downturn in oil and gas prices should be the deciding factor in the duration of her probationary period at UT.

* My research is stronger by multiple metrics (again it is perhaps unrealistic to compare absolute numbers similarly to funding but the high-level pattern speaks of that): one of Zoya's recommenders comments that

1. My only advice would be for her to consider aiming to publish some work in higher-profile or more general journals with a broader readership: at present most papers are published in somewhat specialist petroleum publications."

In contrast all my letters and the Dean's assessment speak of my strong publication record in the highly selective conferences and high-impact journals such as Operations Research which has a very broad readership.

* Most of Zoya's 8 external letters are not from peer institutions, such as Colorado School of Mines, Houston, Oklahoma, Penn State, Texas A&M (and Imperial College London). All of my 9 letters are from peer institutions. I remember the Provost at a meeting on promotion & tenure making a big deal of how important it is to have the external letters from peer institutions for credibility, and I was really pushed to pick only such big names (which is harder since they are loaded with reference letter requests and are often less familiar with the candidate's research, as supposed to researchers in my more immediate research area).

* Impact is measured by citations and what's know as the h-index (higher is better).

- Zoya has an h-index of 11 (Google Scholar) with 372 citations.
- I have an h-index of 17 (Google Scholar) and 994 citations.⁴

* The Dean calls Zoya "an outstanding researcher" while for me she merely says I have "a strong publication record" even though I show that my h-index and citations were higher than multiple (male) peers recently tenured at peer institutions.

* Based on the above points, the conclusions paragraphs in the Dean's assessment for Zoya and for me are very inconsistent. For Zoya:

1. In summary, Dr. Heidari is a dedicated teacher and an outstanding researcher. She established an extremely well-funded research program at Texas A&M from a variety of industry sources, and is working diligently to reestablish her research program at UT. External referees enthusiastically support her promotion. Her record of student advising and mentoring is strong. She is quite active in the professional community and she has received several competitive awards from the Society of Petroleum Engineers.

In contrast, for me she concludes:

Dr. Nikolova has a strong publication record, she has received two prestigious awards, and she is actively engaged with the Simons Institute for the Theory of Computing at UC Berkeley.⁸ However, her teaching record is modest and the budget council expressed concerns about her relatively weak engagement in the department.

* Most notably, the end of the conclusions for Zoya:

1. One may ask why Dr. Heidari is being considered for promotion at this time, when she has not yet reestablished her research program at UT. **A commitment was made when she was recruited from Texas A&M that her promotion case would be considered in a timely manner.** The department budget council and I do not believe that the global downturn in oil and gas prices should be the deciding factor in the duration of her probationary period at UT. As such, I believe that Dr. Heidari's performance meets or exceeds expectations for early promotion to associate professor with tenure in all categories, and I support this case without reservation.

And for me:

If this were an up-or-out case, I would likely agree with the recommendation of the Promotion and Tenure committee. However, Dr. Nikolova is being considered for promotion at UT Austin two years early. I do not believe that she has taken responsibility for improving her teaching, and I have concerns about the sustainability of her research program. These concerns are compounded by the fact that both her teaching and her external funding have dropped since she spent the 2015 fall semester at UC Berkeley.

As such, I do not believe that Dr. Nikolova's performance meets expectations for early promotion to associate professor.

The reassurance to Zoya (made in spring/summer of 2015) was not in writing and I also received a similar verbal reassurance (in spring/summer of 2013) from my Department Chair Ahmed Tewfik, thus I need to ask why hers was honored and mine not.

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